



IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

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LRRB PROJECT COST:

\$698,875



Unpaving roads is one strategy for reducing preservation costs, but the guide provides several other options.



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Putting Research into Practice: Interactive Guide Helps Local Agencies Address Maintenance Funding Gaps

What Was the Need?

Local transportation agencies are facing severe challenges in keeping roads safe and in good repair. Among those challenges are aging infrastructure, increasing material costs, and stagnant or decreasing funding levels. Many local agencies do not have the funding they need to preserve aging road networks and are looking for alternatives to preserve these systems.

To alleviate shortfalls in maintenance funding, some local governments considered unpaving roads. However, this strategy is only one solution and is likely to be unpopular except as a last resort. The Local Road Research Board (LRRB) wanted to provide tools that would help local governments assess their transportation system preservation needs, communicate these needs to elected officials and the public, and evaluate the full range of strategies available to close maintenance funding gaps.

A new interactive guide will help local agencies to evaluate their transportation network preservation needs, communicate these needs to elected officials and the public, and select and implement strategies to address funding gaps.

What Was Our Goal?

The goal of this project was to develop an interactive resource guide, including research, tools and strategies that would help local agencies communicate transportation system preservation needs to elected officials and the public. Agencies can then use these resources to evaluate their options and implement strategies to better maintain their roads.

What Did We Implement?

The guide and tools developed in this project are based in part on the experiences of five Minnesota counties: Anoka, Dakota, Freeborn, Otter Tail and Stearns. These counties provided a representative sampling based on various factors, including environment (urban and rural), demographics, and agency size and budget. The interactive guide includes links to numerous resources that offer background and details for implementing system preservation strategies.

How Did We Do It?

Investigators worked with the five pilot counties to compare the gaps in their maintenance funding to the funding they needed to manage their pavement system, determine whether the county board understands those gaps, and choose implementation strategies to narrow the funding gaps. Based on their experience with the pilot counties and with previous clients, investigators developed a step-by-step guide that local agencies can use to measure, communicate and meet their system preservation needs.

What Was the Impact?

The information in this guide is presented in five sections:

- **Background**—Offers information about the research and the practice of system preservation.

“This guide provides a process for local agencies to look at their transportation systems to evaluate and determine what their best options are for minimizing funding gaps and providing the best possible network of roadways.”

—Michael Marti,
Principal, SRF Consulting
Group, Inc.

“Creating and maintaining a dialogue with elected officials and the public have been critical. Because of that dialogue, we’re now seeing road and bridge funding being prioritized.”

—Sue Miller,
County Engineer,
Freeborn County

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Systems Preservation Guide:
A Planning Process for Local Government
Management of Transportation Networks

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The interactive Systems Preservation Guide provides strategies for addressing maintenance funding shortfalls along with links to supporting documentation and tools to help local agencies evaluate, communicate, build consensus and implement those strategies.

- **Needs Assessment**—Helps agencies define their preservation needs through a three-phase approach: an examination of existing infrastructure and the impacts of current maintenance strategies, an analysis of revenue and expenditures history and forecasts using a sketch tool, and the creation of a State of the County Highway System Report that summarizes the agencies’ pavement preservation needs and the funding gap to meet those needs.
- **Preservation Strategies**—Reviews eight system preservation strategies in four categories: system adjustments (such as recommending interjurisdictional transfers, changing maintenance classifications of roads and unpaving roads); planning and programming (including transportation plans, performance-based standards and project prioritization methodologies); revenue enhancements; and cost reduction or longer life-cycle maintenance methods.
- **Communication Strategies**—Provides outreach and communication strategies for informing and obtaining buy-in from elected officials and taxpayers, with guidance for identifying communication needs and developing a communications plan, tools and messages.
- **Lessons Learned**—Reviews lessons learned by pilot counties that helped develop the system preservation guide, such as details about the strategies, the value of a data-driven process and meaningful graphics in communications, and the utility of the State of the County Highway System Report in educating stakeholders.

The guide provides links to supporting documentation, including tools for collecting revenue and expenditure data, resources for assessing a county’s current maintenance practices, sample reports, case studies and sample communications campaigns.

After using the process presented in the guide, all five pilot counties successfully built consensus among the public and their elected officials to implement either a sales tax or wheelage tax to increase transportation funding. Each county also selected other strategies to address funding shortfalls based on their specific needs and situations.

What’s Next?

Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach that will help every local agency meet its system preservation funding needs, some common principles are critical to success. Agencies should work closely and collaboratively with their elected officials throughout the process. Extensive communication and outreach efforts are required to build consensus for the strategies that are chosen. Agencies also need to understand that the process can be long and potentially overwhelming, and that the pilot counties and MnDOT’s State Aid for Local Transportation can be useful resources.

LRRB’s Research Implementation Committee is currently considering training options and other resources to help local agencies implement the guide.

This Implementation Summary pertains to the LRRB-produced Report 2016-34, “Systems Preservation Guide: A Planning Process for Local Government Management of Transportation Networks,” published July 2016. The full report can be accessed at mndot.gov/research/TS/2016/201634A.pdf.